Neinuhrschdick Un Fieruhrschdick

(Nine o'clock and four o'clock snacks)

By RAYMOND E. HOLLENBACH

The "coffee wagon" has just passed down the hall. For those readers who may not be acquainted with the latest city customs it may be necessary to explain what a "coffee wagon" is. A coffee wagon is a stainless - steel four - wheeled pushcart outfitted with coffee urns, cream and cup dispensers, trays and shelves, etc. These carts are hauled up and down on the elevators and back and forth through the halls and corridors, dispensing coffee and doughnuts, coffee cakes and half a dozen other kinds of pastries to those who care to buy them.

In recent years the custom of having the so-called "coffee breaks" in the middle of the forenoon in offices, factories and other places of business, has become more and more common. Employes are beginning to look upon these breaks for mid - morning snacks as a part of their established rights and clauses to that effect are sometimes written into union contracts. Employers, on the other hand, according to surveys that have been made, feel recompensed by the extra work they get out of employes who have thus been refreshed.

There is an old saying, "History repeats itself." What is this but the old "neinuhrschdick" of our Pennsylvania German ancestors all over again? Only the reasons and need for it are not the same as of old. In spite of our shorter working hours, with our hurried way of life, there just is not enough time for many of us to have breakfast at home!

The "neinuhrschdick" and "fieruhrschdick" on the farm, as our ancestors knew them, are a thing of the past. Those of our older generation, who remember the days before the use of the self-binder became universal, may remember the last vestiges of this old custom. Our neighbors, the Sauerwines, harvested their grain with a mowing machine equipped with an attachment called "der Drepper." This method required the manual labor of rakers and binders, besides the usual number of men to put the grain on shocks. I was too young to help in any of the labor, but I have recollections of the large "henke-karb" filled with eatables and the "schditz" in which water was carried to the workers in the field. For those readers who may not remember the "Schditz" it is a wooden vessel, shaped like an ordinary wooden bucket up-side-down, with a wooden lid. Only the other day I was very much surprised to notice a brand new "schditz" on display in the window of a sporting goods store.

This custom of a mid-morning and a mid-afternoon snack among farm workers was once common all over the world where grain was harvested. Among our Pennsylvania German people one still sometimes hears one speaking of "'s neinuhrschdick," or "'s zeheuhrschdick," depending on the particular locality in which you are. The actual custom, however, is a thing of the past. The afternoon snack, of "fieruhrschdick," is not mentioned as frequently, probably because a heavy noonday meal made it unnecessary and the custom was abandoned earlier. In the days of the sickle and the cradle, when work in the harvest field began at daybreak and ended at dusk, these extra snacks were a matter of absolute necessity, and were not provided just because our ancestors liked to eat or because the providers were overly generous. Nor was the custom peculiar to our German ancestors. The custom was common in the grain fields of England and is mentioned among the early Swedish settlers along the Delaware. Parson James Woodforde, who lived in Norfolk, England, in the 18th century, wrote in his diary, August 17, 1778:

"Began shearing my wheat this morning and gave the shearers according to the Norfolk custom, a good breakfast, at 11 o'clock plumb cakes with caraway seeds in them, and some liquor, a good dinner with plumbpuddings, and at four Beer again."

He further added that these snacks according to the English custom were called "elevens" and "fours." Even now, there is in our unabridged dictionaries the word "bever" which means the same thing.

Many of the writers about the Pennsylvania Germans have mentioned this old custom, but few give us very much in detail — probably because no one thought it necessary to describe in detail a thing that was so common. H. L. Fischer, in "Die Alte Zeite" ('S Alt Marik-Haus Mittes In D'r Schtadt un Die Alte Zeite, York, Pa., 1879), describes it better than anyone else:

"Es ware als zwe extra Ims—
'S isch wohr — es isch ken Draam;
Es Zehe-uhr un's Fuehr-uhr-schtueck,
Hen mir oft gesse an d'r Krik,
Am alte Keschte-baam;
Un's hot uns besser g'schmackt dort draus,
As bescht am Disch im feinschte Haus.

"Was hen die Maed uns als gebrocht,
In selle grosse Kaerb?
Ei, frische Weck un Brod un Fleesch,
Butter un Bickels, Milch un Kaes,
Un Kersche-bai, so merb;
Un's war nix bess'rs in d'r Welt,
As so'n Esse draus im Feld.

Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker, in his column "Old Berks Folklore," several years ago quoted from reminiscences of John Schweyer of Maxatawny, dating back almost a hundred and fifty years, in which he recalled that six meals a day were once the custom—

1. An early breakfast before dawn at the house, consisting of bread and butter, radishes, and the inevitable whiskey, rum, or cidereil.

2. Breakfast in the house at 7 o'clock, at the summons of the dinner horn. The type of breakfast is not described.

3. **Zehe-uhr-schdick,** when lunch was brought to the field in a basket.

4. Dinner in the house, at 12 o'clock, again at the sound of the dinner horn.

5. **Fier-uhr-schdick,** in the field — a repetition of the mid-morning snack.

6. Finally, supper in the house after dark.

Was hen die Maed uns als gebrocht in selle grosse Kaerb?
From H. L. Fischer's DIE ALTE ZEITE (York, Pa., 1879)

Fischer, in "Die Alte Zeite" tells us that it was the custom for the apprentices in the neighboring towns to have two weeks off to spend on the harvest fields, and they were, of course, housed with the farmers. Also, all craftsmen, like shoemakers, carpenters, saddlers, blacksmiths, etc., helped in the harvest fields. As a result there were sometimes as many as fifty workers in one field, and there are records of as many as a hundred. Naturally, this required an enormous quantity of food. Unfortunately, none of our writers tell us much in detail about this, especially what was taken out into the fields. Those were the days before sandwiches, and when food is mentioned it is usually "budderbrod," "boi" and "kuche." For those who did not care for strong drink there was frequently "blooerbalsem tee," but hardly ever coffee, and lemonade was still practically unknown in our rural districts.

An old German book, "Die Hausmutter" (1782) mentioned in previous columns in the Eck, tells in detail about the food that was provided for harvesters in those days in the "old country." This very thorough book of household instructions tells in detail what a good housewife had to provide each day during an entire week. A whole chapter is devoted to "Eine Aerndtewoche fuer Schnitter," in which menus are given for each of the five meals served daily, which were

1. Erstes Fruehstueck im Hause, um fuenf Uhr
2. Zweytes Fruehstueck im Felde, um sieben Uhr
3. Mittagsbrod
4. Vesperbrod im Felde
5. Abendbrod im Hause

The same custom of five meals was followed also for grass mowers, but when the hay or the grain was hauled home, only four meals were provided, because the day was not so long. The two breakfasts were changed into one **Morgenbrod** in the house before leaving for the field.

The first breakfast in the house was the same for every day of the week, namely, **Baermkuchen von feinem Roggenmehl** (that is, raised cake made with a fine rye flour) **Butter und Brandtwein.**

The menu for the main meals differed every day. Breakfast in the field consisted of a soup — a different one each day — **Biersuppe, Buchwaizengruetzsuppe, Habersuppe, Waitzengruetzsuppe,** und **Ostersuppe.** Besides this there were **Setzeyer** (fried eggs) two for each person, or **Harte Eyer.** Just how fried eggs were served in the field is not explained. In addition there were **Baermkuchen und Butter.** The only reason why such a substantial breakfast was served in the field was that the fields in Europe, where people live in villages, were a considerable distance from the house.

The noonday meal was a substantial one — the menu on Monday, for instance, was cooked chicken with rice and small raisins, and at the same meal, roast pork with a small dish of "gebackener Pflaumen" (baked plums). Besides this there were bread and butter, and again **Brandtwein** — which was also served in the field in rationed portions.

The **Vesperbrod,** which corresponded to the **fieruhrschdick** of our Pennsylvania Germans, consisted of **Baermkuchen, Butter und Kaese,** and was carried out to the field by the workmen themselves when they left after the noonday meal.

The **Abendbrod,** or the evening meal in the house, was again a substantial one, such as fried ham, with a salad, and of course bread or **Baermkuchen** and butter. Noticeably absent from all meals all during the week were fresh vegetables. Peas appear once during the whole week, and they were probably dried peas, and cabbage appears on the menu for dinner on Saturday. It appears that our European ancestors just did not eat vegetables in quantity.

(The younger readers of the Eck would be glad to hear from the older readers who have some first-hand knowledge of these nine o'clock and four o'clock snacks, and particularly what food was brought out into the field, and at what hours was it served in your neighborhood. We shall welcome all such information. Kindly address the Editor of the Eck, Care of The Morning Call, Allentown, Pa.)

Royersford, Pa.
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IM SUMMER

Der Summer ist e harter Mann,
Wie macht er uns so heess,
Un fangt mer kaum zu schaffe an,
So lahft a gleich der Schweess;
Der Dorscht, er plogt de Schaffmann schwer,
Un kummt a viel zu trinke her,
Es batt doch Alles nix.

Erscht geht es zu dem Maehe 'naus,
Vor Tag schun kracht die Sens,
Und is es mit der Heuet aus,
Gebt's gleich en annere Tschens,
Do geht's uf Korn un Wehze her,
Und is die Erwet noch so schwer,
Der Bauer muss doch d'ran.

Und doch gleich ich den Bauere Stand
Und schwapp net mit der Stadt,
Er ist so schoen bei uns im Land,
Wann mer a Erwet hat,
Man ist doch g'sund un froh dabei
Un kummt zu kehner Lungerei,
Wie's haeppent in der Stadt.

The above is an early attempt to give poetic expression to rural life among the Pennsylvania Germans in their native dialect. The poem shows the influence of the literary High German, but it also shows the inroads the neighboring English is already making upon our dialect.

The poem appeared anonymously in the Reading ADLER for August 17, 1869. In that same year Ludwig August Wollenweber published his GEMAELDE AUS DEM PENNSYLVANISCHEN VOLKSLEBEN (Philadelphia and Leipzig, 1869), in which the same poem but with various typographical changes apepars over the initials L.A.W.